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A Brief Description
of the
State Historical Library
Building

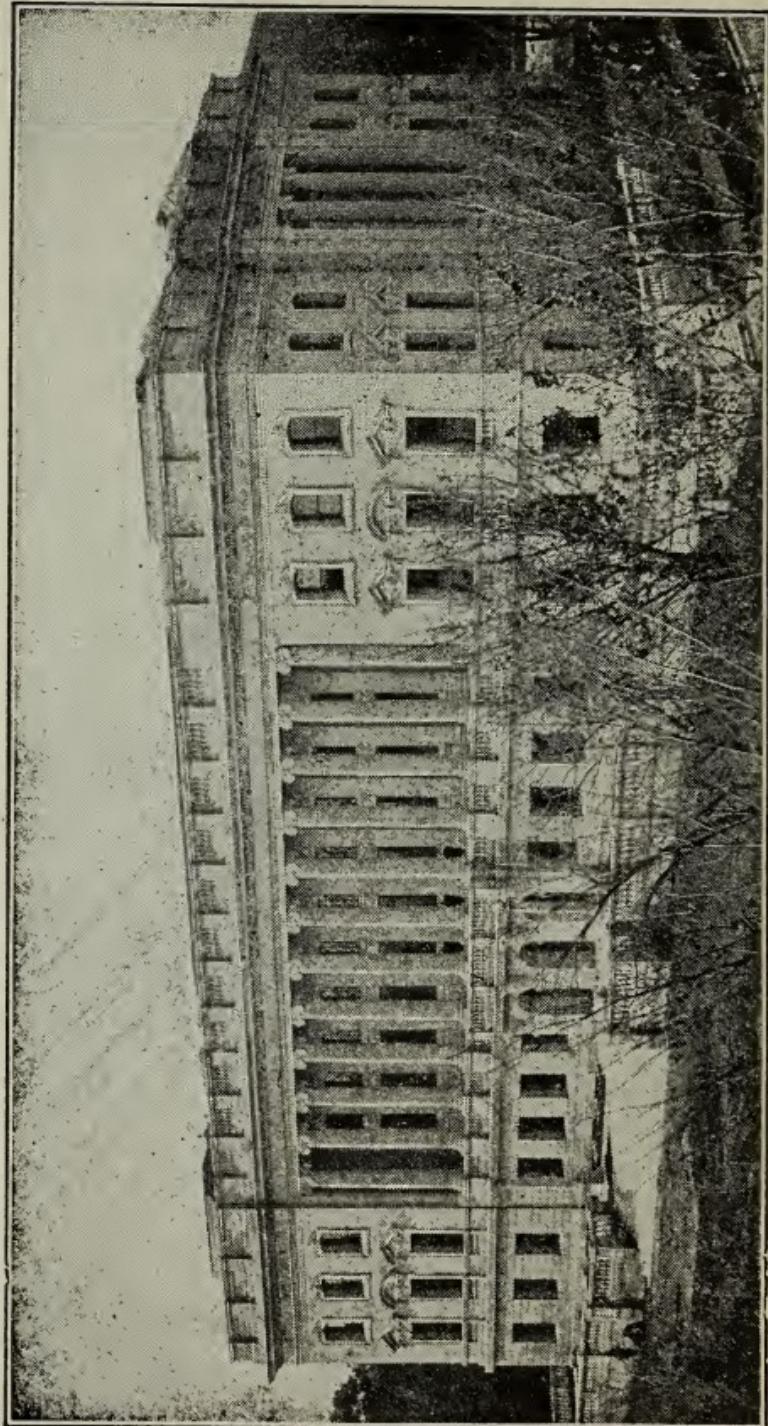
At Madison, Wisconsin



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

August, 1906

The Building from the University Gymnasium



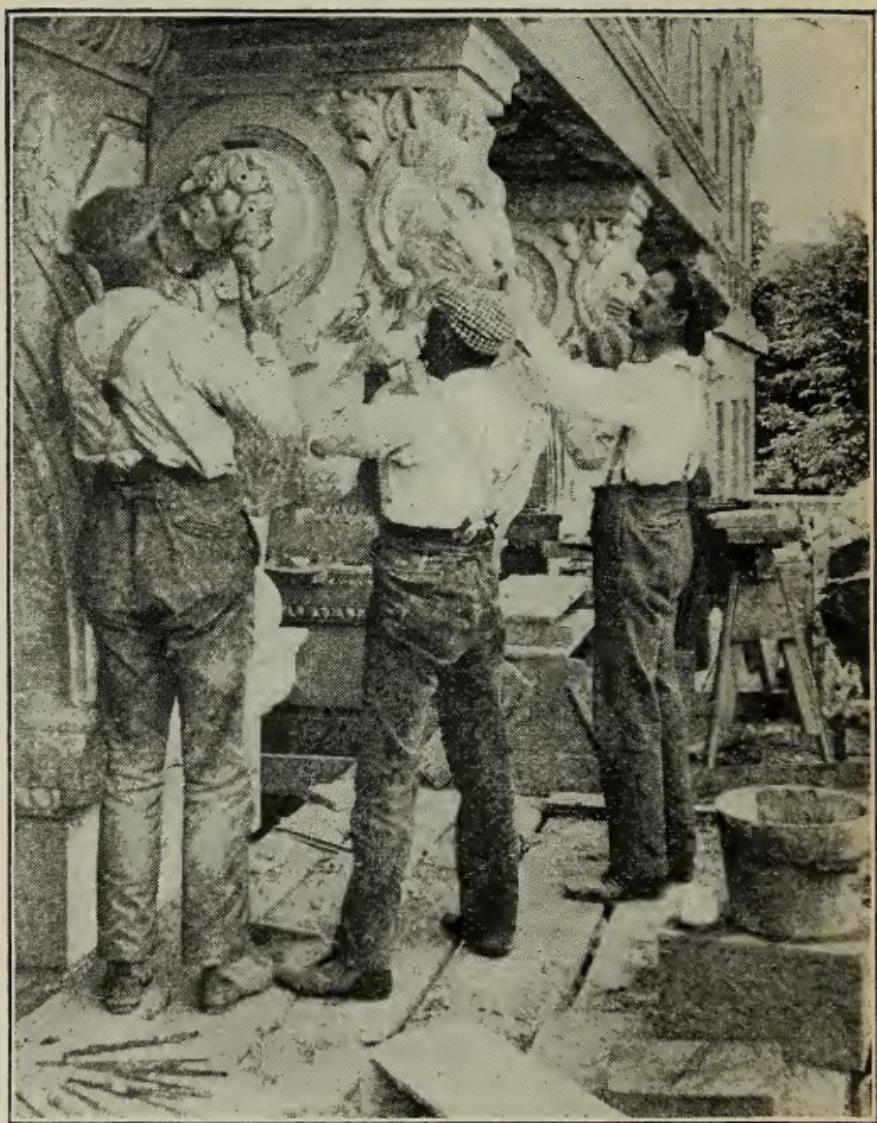
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A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The building was erected by the State (1895-1900) "for the use of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and such other libraries and collections" as might be invited thereto by the said Society.¹ It occupies a plot of ground 264 feet square fronting on State, Park, and Langdon streets, deeded to the State for this purpose by the regents of the University of Wisconsin.

Design and Cost. The building was designed by George B. Ferry and Alfred C. Clas of Milwaukee, and is constructed of Bedford (Indiana) limestone. It is of the Ionic order, in the renaissance style, and with its equipment cost, as it stands, about \$610,000, appropriations therefor being provided by the generosity of the state legislatures of 1895, 1897, and 1899. The contracts were, however, chiefly let in 1895, at a time when prices were unus-

¹Sec. 1, chap. 257, Laws of Wisconsin for 1897.



Carvers at work on East facade

ually low; it is probable that building and equipment could not today be replaced for a million dollars.

The form of construction is what architects style "fireproof," being primarily a steel frame anchored in solid stone walls; floors are of hollow tile, and walls either of the same material or of metal lath and adamant plaster. Exceptional administrative care is taken also to prevent fire—there are in the building neither furnaces nor grates, it being heated by steam furnished from the University's central heating plant, with which it is connected by a tunnel. There are about 2,000 electric lamps; but being laid in metal conduits, wires are unexposed.

The building is administered by the State Historical Society as trustee of the State; but in consideration of the fact that the library and seminaries of the University are also housed herein, and that a large percentage of the users are members of the University, the cost of maintenance (exclusive of salaries of the respective library staffs) is divided equally between

the two institutions. In addition to the State Historical Library (about 145,000 volumes and 140,000 pamphlets), and the Library of the University of Wisconsin (115,000 volumes and 35,000 pamphlets), there is also located here the Library of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters (7,000 volumes), making a total of over 440,000 books and pamphlets at present within the building. Both of the two principal libraries are now having a rapid growth, and these figures will soon be distanced.

In the purchase of books, the libraries sharply differentiate—the State Historical Library confining its acquisitions to American and British history and biography, religious history, general geography and travels, Shakespeariana, maps, manuscripts, general periodicals, newspaper files, and public documents (American, Canadian, and British); while the University Library limits its purchases to foreign history (except the British Empire), literature, philosophy, philology, sociology, science, and the useful and fine arts. Thus

avoiding duplication, it is sought, so far as practicable with the resources at hand, to cover the entire field of knowledge.

Although the administrative departments of the two libraries were at the outset provided for, but one of the two proposed bookstack wings (the southern) has thus far been completed; the northern wing has yet to be constructed. The normal **book storage capacity** of the building was intended to be approximately 413,000 volumes, when all shelving was occupied. The building is now filled to a far greater extent than was supposed possible at the outset. The proposed new stack wing would probably house 225,000 additional volumes. The building would then have about sixteen miles of shelving, with a capacity of possibly something over 670,000 volumes. The plans provide, also, for an ultimate transverse wing along Park street, connecting the two book-stack wings.

The basement is occupied by the ventilating and plumbing apparatus, electric motors, unpacking and storage rooms, and the State Historical Library's famous

collection of newspaper files (which is second only in extent to that of the Library of Congress, at Washington).

The first (entrance) floor contains at the south end the State Historical Library's departments of public documents, newspaper files (consultation room), maps and manuscripts (including the widely-known Draper and Wisconsin collections), and patent office reports (American, Canadian, Australian, and British). At the north end are the seminaries of the University departments of history, economics, political science, and mathematics. In the central portion (west side) will be found cloak and toilet rooms for men (south) and women (north). An electric passenger elevator, at the south end, connects all floors.

Marble work. All of the marble used in the building was imported from Italy. That principally in use, for wainscoting, stair-rails, bases, facings, etc., is the so-called English pencil-veined white; treads, risers, and landings are of the blue-veined variety; the panels on both sides of stair railings are of Paonazzo.

The pavements of the public corridors



A marble stairway

are of marble mosaic. The devices seen upon the first floor pavement in the main corridor, represent some of the "marks" used by early printers to individualize and ornament the title-pages of their



The Aldine mark

books: England being represented by the mark of William Caxton, 1489; Germany by that of Melchior Lotter, 1491-1536; Venice by that of Aldus Manutus, 1502;

France by that of Jehan Frellon, 1540-50; Holland by the Elziver mark, 1620; while modern America is represented by the celebrated mark of the Riverside Press (Cambridge, Mass.).

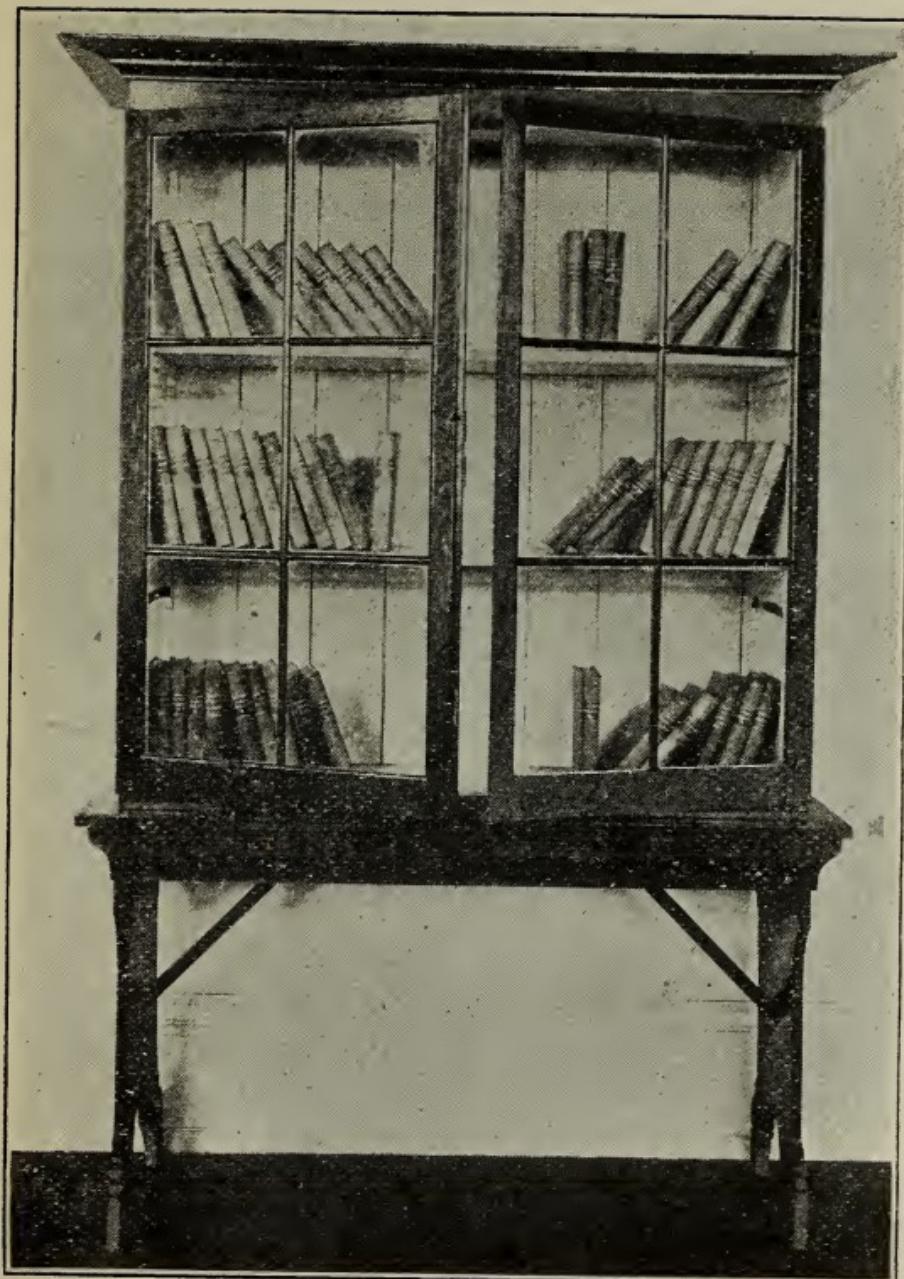
At the south end of **the second floor** are the administrative offices of the State Historical Library, and at the north those of the University Library; lying between them are the great reading room (seating 240 persons, with some 5,000 general reference books upon the walls), together with the delivery room (with the public card catalogue of the libraries) and the room for bound periodicals (seating about 40 persons). The dark red furniture of these rooms is constructed of mahogany.

There are two delivery counters—the northern serving the University Library, the southern the State Historical Library. Through the gate in the latter, access is had to **the book-stack wing** in the rear. Here are six floors of enameled rolled-steel stacks, each floor having a capacity of about 42,000 volumes. The several floors are connected by an automatic electric freight elevator, also by a book lift of similar mechanism.

At the south end of **the third floor** are the State Historical Library's lecture hall, the office of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters, and several administrative rooms connected with the Historical Library; at the north end are the seminaries of the University departments of German, Latin, Greek, French, English, philosophy, and education. Most of these seminaries contain special libraries of much value.

A visitor's balcony, overlooking the great reading room, lies between. Back of the brass railing is the genealogical department of the State Historical Library and the art departments of both libraries. Like that in the reading room below, the red furniture in the balcony is of mahogany.

The fourth floor is devoted to the Museum of the State Historical Society. The most popular departments are probably the New England kitchen (east long room), the two rooms devoted to engravings and color prints, the room wherein are kept the relics of Wisconsin in several wars (1812-15, Secession, and Spanish-Ameri-



The State Historical Library in 1853

can), the ethnological hall (south wing), and the Adams collection of laces and bric-a-brac (south wing).

Near the north end of the corridor are the now tattered flags carried by Wisconsin regiments in the War of Secession, and here temporarily housed until the completion of the new Capitol.

The majority of the portraits along the walls in the north and south galleries are those of men and women prominent in the pioneering days of Wisconsin. In the east long room, near the New England kitchen, is the original library case wherein, but little over a half century ago, were kept the fifty or so volumes then owned by the State Historical Library. A carriage once belonging to Daniel Webster is in close proximity.

In this hall are also some impressive relics of the New Richmond tornado of 1899; and numerous interesting reminders of early Wisconsin in both its French fur-trading and its Anglo-Saxon pioneering stages. One of the earliest printing presses in Wisconsin occupies a glass case by itself, in the south gallery; in another,

near by, is a wooden anchor of the French regime. In the north gallery are plaster casts of famous Greek marbles, and numerous paintings of interest—among them a canvas by the Russian artist, Verestchagin, representing Wisconsin troops in a battle in the Philippines. Other paintings of note are in the south gallery (near the elevator), two of them being idealized representations of events in Wisconsin history—the landfall of Nicolet (1634), and Langlade's attack at Braddock's defeat (1755).

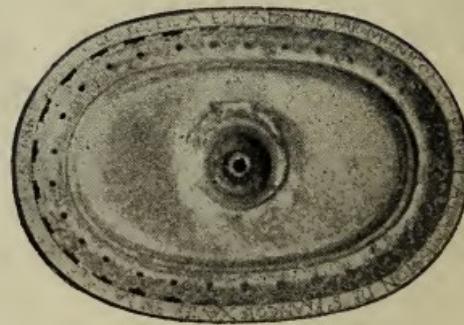
The most famous object of historical interest in the museum will be found in the ethnological hall—the silver ostensorium presented to the old Jesuit mission at De Pere in 1686, by Nicolas Perrot, then commandant for the French in the country of the upper Great Lakes. The collection of prehistoric pottery and copper and stone implements, displayed in this hall, is large and interesting.



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Elevation



The base, with contemporary inscription

The Perrot ostensorium, 1686